

September 15, 2015

How to Develop a Time-Saving Content Marketing Process



Great Content Doesn't Happen by Accident

As a marketer, you've probably heard that content is king. However, like a lot of royalty, good content has a reputation for being high maintenance. Of course, quality content deserves its crown when it can attract the right audience to your website and then lead potential buyers to a sales conversion. You are probably already quite familiar with the marketing planning process, either as a content marketer or as somebody who needs to hold a marketing team accountable for producing that content. If so, you are probably also struggling to devote the time it takes to develop and consistently follow an effective content marketing strategy. There's no doubt that planning, producing and promoting quality content is a lot of work. But, first-class content doesn't happen by accident. This guide explores some tips and best practices to keep your content on a throne and your marketing team able to meet its pressing demands.

Planning a Content Marketing Strategy

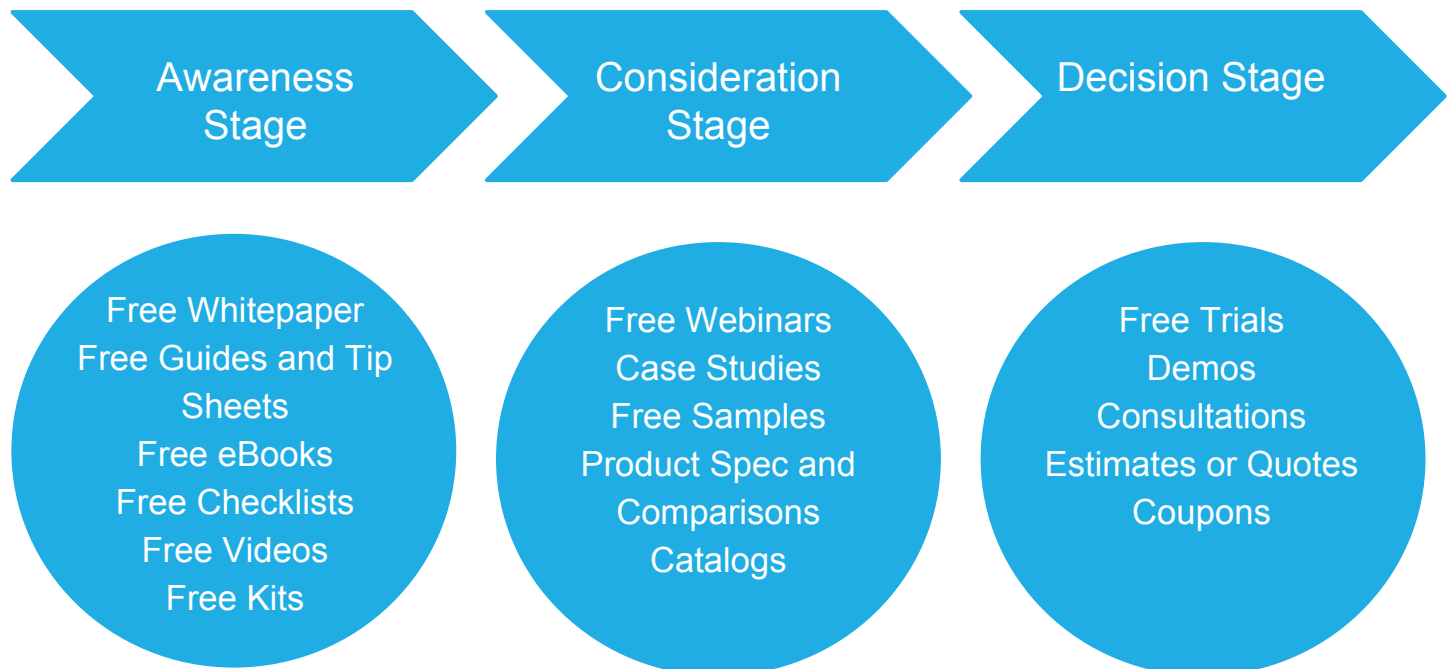
Every king must make his citizens believe in him — after all, a king that doesn't meet the needs of his kingdom can potentially be overthrown. The same goes for content — you must produce subject matter that's intended to meet your target audience's needs so they believe in your brand and trust that you have the answers they are searching for. Otherwise, they may end up choosing a competitor. Although you might not think you have time to map out a detailed content marketing process, the truth is that *you really don't have time to forsake planning*. Once you have a detailed process in place, you will streamline the rest of your efforts and save time in the long run. So, before you begin producing content without a clear path to follow, you need to figure out what results you need and how you might achieve them.



Steps to Build Your Content Process

1. Develop a buyer persona.

Using marketing research and information about your customer base, develop a representative character who you believe is most likely to consider buying your product or service. Your buyer persona profile might include information such as gender, age, job title, interests, most common needs and other facts that give insight into their buying behaviors and problems that need resolved. This character will become the target buyer to focus your marketing efforts on. You'll create content with their needs and demographic information in mind so it's relevant to your most typical customers. Since we know you're pressed for time, [HubSpot](#) provides an easy-to-use template to help you create a comprehensive profile, and document it.




2. Decide what types of content you need to fit the entire buyer's journey (see figure above).

As this [HubSpot guide illustrates](#), you should focus on developing content that fits with each stage of the buyer's journey so you meet a lead's needs along the entire path to purchase. That means you need content that would appeal to them at three lifecycle stages: awareness, consideration and decision.

Here are examples of appropriate content for each stage:

- **Awareness:** blog posts, eBooks, how-to guides, white papers
- **Consideration:** case studies or worksheets
- **Decision:** demos, quote requests, pilot programs

You don't have to create each of these types of content all at once, but you should at least decide what resources you'd like to produce in the future besides just blog posts.

 PERSONA	LIFECYCLE STAGE		
Name: Jimmy Gym Owner	Awareness Where does he start?	Consideration What needs figured out?	Decision How can he move forward?
What's his story? Jimmy is new to gym ownership. He needs to buy some gym equipment, but is unsure where to begin, how much he should spend, etc.	Content Ideas: 1. Beginner's Guide to Buying Gym Equipment (eBook) 2. New or used: When to Stretch your Gym Equipment Budget and When to Splurge (Infographic)	Content Ideas: 1. Gym Equipment Budget Template (Excel Spreadsheet) 2. Purchasing Timeline for Gym Equipment: What Should You Buy First? (PowerPoint worksheet)	Content Ideas: 1. Request a quote 2. Phone assessment of equipment needs

3. Align your content with each stage of the sales funnel (see example above and download a blank template to fill out for yourself [here](#)).

This stage of planning is closely related to developing content that follows a lead's path to purchase. Your sales funnel should accommodate your customers as they move from the awareness stage to the decision stage. You accomplish this by creating relevant offers — we're talking white papers, case studies, etc. — that you deliver through clear conversion paths, [such as an email lead nurturing campaign](#) or [clear calls-to-action](#), that lead potential buyers to the next stage of the sales funnel.

As [indicated in this HubSpot article](#), the typical inbound sales funnel consists of three parts: the top of the funnel, middle of the funnel and bottom of the funnel. Prospects at the top know they have a problem (as they're in the awareness stage), folks in the middle may be trying to decide if your product or service is the best solution (since they're in the consideration stage) and those hot leads at the bottom are getting ready to buy the top of the funnel a whitepaper, while you'd probably offer a lead at the bottom of the funnel a demo. For content to lead to sales success and revenue you must keep in mind how your team utilizes your content and how to *offer each lead relevant content based on what stage they're in* to logically nudge them towards eventually making a purchase.

4. Document your plans

Since you put in so much work to decide what type of content you need to produce to meet your buyer persona along the entire path to purchase, you should make sure you document your planning process.

A plan and a process are key to making sure your content becomes a reality. For instance, create a PDF of your buyer personas and some flow charts that match your content with your sales funnel. If you create sharable documents, they can serve as a base for you and your team to keep records of production process.



Organizing and Delegating the Process

Since content is king, your marketing team is like the nobles that ensure his demands are carried out within the kingdom. They must guarantee your content maintains its quality, and actually gets produced, by effectively carrying out the necessary processes from production to promotion. If you're the entire marketing department, you will need to practice strict self-management to deliver that goals you set for yourself.

To translate content plans into a specific number of blog posts per week, whitepapers per quarter, etc., you need to decide how you will delegate responsibilities to your marketing team. Somebody, even if it is just you, must make sure the content gets produced, published and is aligned with the sales funnel.

Here are some ways to break down the content production workflow and ensure that you achieve your goals:

1. Blog management:

Somebody needs to make certain that blog posts are written on time and then published consistently. Each month, this person should produce a content calendar that includes information like posting dates, titles, relevant research and SEO keywords you're trying to rank for. This free content calendar template from HubSpot can help you get started. Work at least a week or two ahead so you have time to write, edit and create graphics for each week's blog posts.

2. Advanced content management:

Whoever manages your blog should also manage the production of your advanced content, like whitepapers and eBooks. You'll have to write, edit and design the documents, so set a timeline to get each step done efficiently. Don't let these in-depth pieces get lost in the shuffle; they're essential for having a content arsenal that's equipped for each stage of your sales funnel and the buyer's journey.

3. Promotion:

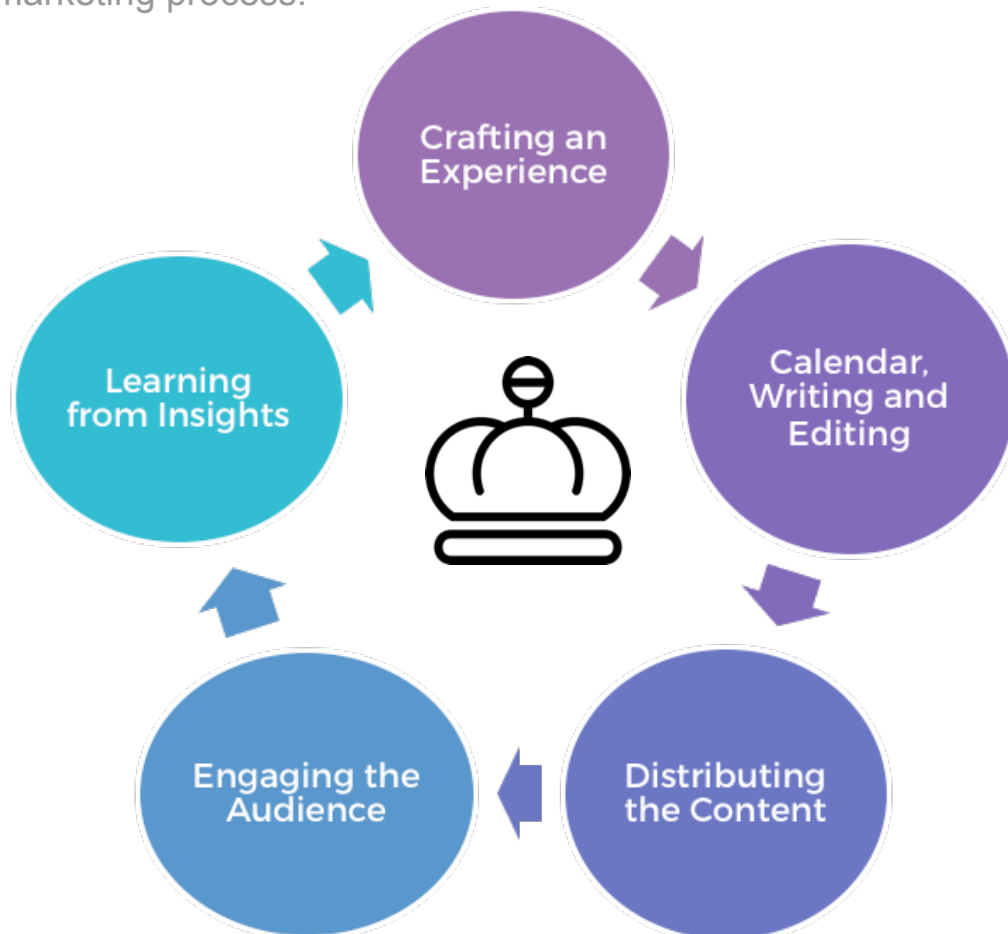
Based on your prior efforts and success, your buyer personas and other marketing research, you have to decide how you will let people know that you have an awesome blog, informative whitepapers and helpful case studies, etc. Some effective strategies might include posting content to your social media accounts, paying for search and social ads or even publishing your content as a guest blogger on other relevant websites.



The right answer depends on your budget, the strength of your existing social media profiles and where you know your buyer persona hangs out online. If you have millions of Facebook fans and can produce content so addictive that it shares itself, you might not need to spend a lot of money. If not, you will probably save time by investing in some sponsored posts. It's up to you to decide what will get your content the most engagement and drive traffic to your website.

You Must Define Who is Responsible for What

Be productive, not busy - and make sure your team is working together to develop and follow through on an award-winning content marketing plan. Like any other process, your content marketing is doomed to fail without accountability, clearly defined roles and a way to measure overall performance. See the figure below and quickly define who would be responsible for each of these key functions in the content marketing process.



An Inside Look at Our Roles and Responsibilities

Who is crafting the experience? A Marketing Manager and Content Strategist

Who makes the content calendar? The Content Strategist

Who writes the content? An Industry Expert Freelance Writer

Who edits the content? The Content Strategist

Who distributes the content? A Marketing Coordinator

Who engages with the audience in *real time*? The Marketing Coordinator

Who learns from the insights to adapt the strategy? The Marketing Manager

Developing a Content Production Process

Following through with production is essential for successful content marketing. You wouldn't want to make a king late for his ball, would you (ok, we're getting cheesy now)? When you set a schedule for your blog and other content, it's best to stick to it and avoid falling into a cycle that doesn't produce consistent work. If you've planned, organized and delegated well, this might actually be the most streamlined and least stressful part of the entire process. Based upon your content calendars, you can figure out how much time you need to produce, order, edit, post and promote your work. You should be able to follow the documentation that you produced in the prior sections like a roadmap — that's why they are so important. You put in the initial work, and then production falls into place smoothly afterwards.

1. Develop and use a workflow.

You should decide how far in advance you need to write each blog post in order to have plenty of time to edit and design it before posting. Some content may need accompanying graphics developed, or even calls-to-action that link to one of your advanced content offers. It's best to develop a clear workflow that draws out exactly how many days are needed per task, as well as who will perform the task, so you can keep your production on schedule.

2. Don't wait until the last minute.

Quality content takes time to develop, and it may even need revisions after it has been written. Some things will inevitably take longer than you thought they would, so it's always better to schedule in a bit too much time per task than far too little. Many content marketers work on content at least a month before it's due.

3. Consider outsourcing some of your content.

If you find yourself stretched too thin when the time comes to actually write all of those blog posts, research whitepapers and develop a promotion strategy, you might want to consider outsourcing some of your workload. You can find competent freelancers to help you write blog posts and create graphics. You can still control your content by giving your outsourced writer or designer clear instructions and outlines, and edit the end product so it contains your brand's voice and communicates your desired message. By investing in outsourced content, you may discover you have more time to manage your marketing planning process and stick to the larger goals you set for your company. Your marketing team can develop the big picture and work more efficiently by allowing others to connect the dots.



Run Your Marketing Kingdom Smoothly

Your first step to content marketing success is developing a comprehensive planning process that sets the groundwork for your future content goals. Once you have a buyer persona developed and understand what advanced content you need to match your sales funnel to the buyer's path to purchase, all that's left is coming up with relevant topics per content piece and making sure they get produced.

If you develop a clear workflow, give yourself ample production time and make use of the right resources, actually sticking to a schedule should be smooth sailing. Yes, we believe that content is king, and with the right context and strategy in place, you'll be ready to navigate the King's Highway.